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New York

President:	Mr. Grauls	(Belgium)
Members:	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/495)

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08-45136 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/495)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al-Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/495, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007). I wish to draw the attention of members to document S/2008/523, which contains the text of a note verbale dated 4 August 2008 from the Permanent Mission of Iraq transmitting a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and by His Excellency Mr. Alejandro Wolff, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: Mr. President, I thank you for this opportunity to brief the Council on developments in Iraq and the work of the United Nations in the country. Our efforts have increased in important ways during the year since the adoption of resolution 1770 (2007) in August 2007. Members of the Council have before them the fourth quarterly report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of that resolution, focusing on the activities in the latest period of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

From the moment he visited Iraq early in his term of office, the Secretary-General has made clear his strong commitment to seeing the United Nations do more to help the Government and the people of that country. That has not been an easy task given the circumstances in Iraq, but today, under the more the robust mandate of resolution 1770 (2007) and the strong leadership of his Special Representative on the ground, the United Nations is steadily expanding its presence and activities in Iraq, while remaining mindful of the very complex operating environment in the country.

During the past year, we have witnessed steady changes in Iraq that should be noted. As the Secretary-General's report underscores, political and military efforts have contributed to improved security in most parts of the country, most visibly during the past three months. Violent incidents and casualties have declined and we have witnessed the improved performance of Iraq's security forces during a series of operations. However, civilian casualties as a result of violence remain unacceptably high. A string of suicide bombings just last week killed 60 people and injured hundreds more in Baghdad and Kirkuk, a brutal reminder of the lengths to which some are willing to go to provoke hatred and division among the Iraqi people.

As the Secretary-General's report also makes clear, it is necessary to cement the gains on the security front through strengthened and sustained political dialogue. While a window for improved political dialogue may exist, the situation does remain tenuous and progress achieved thus far could be lost. There has, however, been some progress. The leading Sunni bloc,

Tawafuq, recently returned to the Government, and Prime Minister Al-Maliki filled the vacant cabinet posts that were empty since the boycotts of last spring and summer. The proper implementation of the Amnesty Law, which went into effect in February of this year, has the potential to contribute to developing trust between communities in the country. While the political atmosphere in Baghdad, Kirkuk and elsewhere deteriorated somewhat during the recent debate on the election law, we are hopeful that the Iraqi parties are coming to recognize the need to continue and to expand the extent of their political dialogue.

Since the Council handed down a new mandate for UNAMI one year ago, the Mission has worked with great energy to ensure its implementation. UNAMI continues to focus on advancing political dialogue, national reconciliation and the resolution of disputed internal boundaries, as well as on preparations for the provincial elections in order to ensure they are seen as credible and broadly accepted by the Iraqi people.

Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission, with assistance from UNAMI, has reached a number of operational milestones. Those include organizing the field structure needed to conduct the voter registration update, which is successfully under way in all of Iraq's governorates. The Electoral Commission, with UNAMI's support, recruited and trained nearly 8,000 staff to administer voter registration services to 564 centres nationwide. Almost all centres have been open throughout the voter registration period, which is a notable feat considering the immense operational and security challenges inside Iraq. UNAMI has also advised the Electoral Commission on how to ensure transparency and strong oversight in the voter registration update process. The international electoral team, in its visits to voter registration centres and field election offices throughout the country, continues to be impressed by the knowledge and professionalism of election administration staff. The Electoral Commission has thus far accredited close to 20,000 political party agents and observers to monitor election events.

Without new electoral legislation, however, those critical governorate elections cannot go forward. As we meet here this morning, discussions in the Iraqi Parliament in Baghdad around the adoption of a new law remain unresolved. The United Nations has been doing all it can to urge the reaching of practical compromises. In that regard, I would include the fact that we have been involved in all of the discussions that have been ongoing in recent days on the issue, offering many variations to the parties to try to help them to reach a compromise. A failure to come to agreement on a law at this time would be a major setback, not only for the prospects for elections this year, but for the larger process of national reconciliation in Iraq.

In connection with discord over the passage of the election law, the situation in Kirkuk grew more tense and turned violent last week. The bloodshed in Kirkuk illustrated just how fragile the situation has become and how the lack of dialogue and compromise could easily lead to renewed violence. The passage of the draft election law that was subsequently vetoed and the Kirkuk Provincial Council decision to set in motion mechanisms for a referendum on the status of Kirkuk were provocations by both sides that were inevitably going to raise tensions.

UNAMI continues its work on the issue of Kirkuk and disputed internal boundaries, and hopes to establish the firm recognition among Iraqi parties that sustainable peace can be based only upon collective solutions acceptable to all concerned. The Mission plans to present its next set of analyses on disputed territories to the Presidency Council, the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan regional Government during the fall. While UNAMI is working as an honest broker to establish a mutually acceptable way to handle those complex issues, we have repeatedly stressed that the ultimate responsibility to make the difficult decisions lies first and foremost with the Government of Iraq and the other representatives of the Iraqi people.

In addition to addressing disputed internal boundaries and the adoption of an inclusive electoral law, there is a need for progress on the fundamental issues that define the nature of the Iraqi State. Those include defining the nature of the federal framework in Iraq, establishing a clear revenue-sharing mechanism and equitably managing Iraq's considerable resources. The United Nations continues to assist the Constitutional Review Committee in the expeditious conclusion of its work, and important related legislation continues to be discussed. Tackling those core issues is as vital as it is difficult and will require wisdom, patience and compromise by all sides.

Iraq's neighbours and other States in the region have a vested interest in Iraq's stability and can and should play a constructive role in that regard. During the past year, numerous positive steps were taken to strengthen regional cooperation in support of Iraq. Following the Stockholm conference to review annual progress in the implementation of the International Compact with Iraq and, in the wake of the security operations conducted with the leadership of Prime Minister Al-Maliki, several member States in the region announced the restoration of full diplomatic representation in Baghdad. Additionally, two meetings of the expanded Conference of Iraq's Neighbours took place at the ministerial level: in Turkey in November 2007 and in Kuwait in April 2008. The Secretary-General and the Iraqi Prime Minister also hosted a high-level meeting on Iraq here in New York last September. The second round of working group meetings on border security, refugees and energy were also held and UNAMI is currently assisting Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in preparation for the next cycle of working group meetings, leading up to a ministerial conference in Baghdad later this year. The Mission is helping to build the capacity of the dedicated unit within the Ministry, which has been playing a pivotal role in preparing those events.

We strongly welcome the developments on the regional front and hope that other regional States will seize on opportunities for turning the regional dialogue process into a real partnership based on mutual interests and concrete cooperation in diplomatic, political, economic and cultural areas. Both Iraq and regional actors must do more, and the United Nations is ready to assist in that effort.

Supporting Iraq's reconstruction and development remains a top priority for the United Nations. While the economy continues to grow due in large part to high oil prices, that has not yet translated into improvements in the lives of ordinary citizens. Unemployment rates remain stubbornly high and the same governorates rate consistently low on key socio-economic indicators such as unemployment, malnutrition and illiteracy. It is estimated that 60 per cent of Iraqis do not have access to one or more essential social services and that 15 per cent lack food security. However, security improvements present a new opportunity for Iraq's oil wealth to reach its population and improve their lives.

In addition to United Nations assistance for the purpose of meeting those needs, we are working with the Government of Iraq on economic reform for private sector development, aimed particularly at increasing employment opportunities and at diversifying the nation's economic output, which is now heavily reliant upon oil. A new $30-million project will be dedicated to assist in the development of a viable and functioning private sector in Iraq.

Economic initiatives were also central to the agenda of the first annual review of the International Compact with Iraq, which was held in Stockholm, Sweden, on 29 May 2008. One hundred States and organizations were in attendance. The Government of Iraq presented its initiatives for full integration with the regional and global economies, including the establishment of an investment commission, private sector partnerships and transregional initiatives to promote investment, trade and greater cooperation with neighbouring States. The Conference welcomed the Government of Iraq's proposal for a partnership for development, which recognizes that Iraq is a wealthy country that requires technical assistance more than aid. As a result, in close cooperation with the Government of Iraq and donors, we are transitioning from high-capital projects to co-financing, capacity-building and technical assistance.

The Iraq Trust Fund — to which the European Commission and Japan, among other donors, have been particularly generous contributors — has already disbursed $1 billion. The $300 million that remain are actively being programmed. The Trust Fund goals are now fully aligned with the Compact. With the consent of the Government of Iraq and its donors, it is envisioned that the Iraq Trust Fund will complete activities at the same time as the Compact, in 2011. United Nations assistance will continue supporting the Government of Iraq as it leads its own recovery.

Increased attention has been placed on the humanitarian needs of Iraqis and on alleviating the suffering of Iraqi refugees, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups. Over 2.8 million people are currently displaced inside Iraq, and they, together with refugees from neighbouring countries, are returning to their places of origin at a steady rate of up to 10,000 people per month.

The percentage of United Nations projects dedicated to humanitarian activities has increased,

supported by funding received through the 2008 Iraq consolidated appeal, which currently stands at 47 per cent funded, or $128 million. A regional appeal is being prepared for 2009 that will aim to incorporate into one framework the funding needs not only inside Iraq, but also of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. In consultation with the donors, $20 million of the $55 million that the Trust Fund has gained through interest have been dedicated to addressing humanitarian needs, including through the development of an emergency response fund, which will provide a rapid response capacity to handle the effects of the major military operations that have transpired during the reporting period.

In the military operations undertaken in Basra and Sadr City, United Nations agencies provided emergency water, medicines and food parcels to affected communities and maintained constant dialogue with military commanders, briefing them on the humanitarian situation and its possible deterioration. However, humanitarian access during military operations is often constrained and humanitarian actors at times have felt it unsafe to deliver urgent relief. All parties to conflict should do their utmost to normalize and facilitate humanitarian access during these critical times.

During the reporting period, the UNAMI Human Rights Office also focused its monitoring and advocacy activities on the plight of Iraqi civilians who reside in the areas where intense fighting has taken place in recent months. Although much has been accomplished in promoting the protection of human rights and the rule of law in Iraq, a great deal more remains to be done. Journalists, educators, medical doctors, judges and lawyers remained prime targets for armed militia and criminal gangs. Gender-based violence, murders, suicides and so-called honour crimes also continued to be documented. UNAMI continues to seek better access to detention centres and improved mechanisms for the efficient legal processing of detainees. Beyond its monitoring and advocacy actions, UNAMI continues to run an active programme of human rights capacity-building and training for Government officials and civil society groups. The Mission also actively supports the work of the Ministry of Human Rights and devotes significant attention to legislative activity relating to human rights and the rule of law.

Under the leadership of Special Representative De Mistura, UNAMI, along with the United Nations country team, is working hard to build an enhanced presence throughout the country, despite the obvious challenges and continuous security threats to operations in Iraq. The Baghdad and Erbil offices are expanding, a presence has been established in Basra and Kirkuk, and planning is under way to post national and international staff in Mosul, Najaf and Ramadi. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization have moved their most senior staff from Amman to Baghdad, and the overall ceiling for United Nations staff members in Iraq has been raised further to accommodate those trends. UNAMI's Iraqi Government liaison officers are currently operating in the offices of nine governors throughout Iraq. Their presence has been instrumental in expanding the breadth and depth of United Nations contact beyond the nation's capital.

Security remains essential for the United Nations to function in Iraq, and support and protection from Member States is vital. I would like to express appreciation to the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I), the Department of Safety and Security and others for the support they have already provided. In view of the possible changes in the current arrangement for the presence of the MNF-I after 31 December 2008, it is essential that the security of the United Nations presence continue to be ensured.

The so-called distinct entity established in 2004 under the unified command of the multinational forces with a dedicated mission to provide security for the United Nations presence in Iraq recently received contributions that will ensure its operation well into 2009. I would therefore like to thank the Governments of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy and Germany for their recent generous contributions to the Trust Fund to Support the Distinct Entity Created to Provide Security for the United Nations Presence in Iraq. We encourage Member States to consider further contributions to the Trust Fund and to provide additional military advisers to the Mission in Iraq, as they remain a critical component of expanding our presence inside the country. We are further grateful to Georgia, Fiji, the Republic of Korea and South Africa for providing security and operational support.

Construction of a new integrated compound in Baghdad is essential to the presence of the United Nations in Iraq. I would therefore like to thank the Government of Iraq for its provision of a site for the

new integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad and urge it to finalize the arrangement for the co-funding of that important project.

I would also acknowledge the leadership that Special Representative De Mistura has displayed in that very difficult operating environment. He and his team of national and international staff have done extraordinary work for Iraq and its people.

As I said at the outset, Iraqis have witnessed an improvement in security. However, as I said before, the situation remains fragile and recent gains could easily be lost. It is imperative that we not become complacent due to recent achievements. Efforts must now focus on achieving the political gains necessary to build trust and confidence across community lines and to improve the quality of life for all Iraqis, including the delivery of basic services and the generation of employment. The United Nations continues to believe that trust is best established by tackling the issues at the heart of each community's competing vision for the future of Iraq. That includes the federal framework of the country, the handling of Kirkuk and other disputed territories, the distribution of wealth from hydrocarbons and a viable revenue-sharing agreement. The potential is there, and it is ultimately up to the Iraqi people to make sound choices that will allow them to build a sustainable and lasting peace. I can assure the Council that we in the United Nations are making a strong contribution and will continue to try to help Iraq in that process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): I am pleased to report to the Security Council on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I). I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the important work undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and extend our appreciation through him to all our United Nations colleagues on the ground in Iraq for their ongoing dedication and hard work.

Today, on behalf of MNF-I, I would like to discuss seven points on the progress achieved thus far.

First, allow me to address the sustained decrease in security incidents and violence. For the past three months, total security incidents have remained at their lowest level in over four years. In just the past year, since June 2007, the overall number of attacks has decreased by 84 per cent; civilian deaths due to violence have decreased by 65 per cent; Iraqi Security Forces deaths have decreased by 67 per cent; United States military deaths have decreased by 91 per cent; coalition military deaths have decreased by 96 per cent; explosions due to improvised explosive devices have decreased by 75 per cent; suicide explosions have decreased by 65 per cent; and ethno-sectarian deaths have decreased by 94 per cent.

Coalition forces and Iraqi Security Forces have achieved those security gains even as MNF-I has drawn down forces from surge levels. The United States has withdrawn, without replacement, the last of its five surge brigade combat teams, as well as its Marine expeditionary unit and two Marine battalions. Also, the Australian battle group has departed from Iraq and the Polish contingent will soon be withdrawn.

Ongoing security operations in Basra, Sadr City, Mosul, Amarah and Diyala have produced encouraging results, further degrading the capabilities of Al-Qaida in Iraq and reducing the influence of illegal militias in strategic Iraqi cities. Nonetheless, Al-Qaida in Iraq remains a serious threat, particularly in the North. It retains the intent and the capability of carrying out sensational, lethal attacks, and its use of person-borne improvised explosive devices and female suicide bombers remains a particular challenge.

We also remain concerned by the flow of foreign fighters and lethal aid into Iraq. Syria is the primary gateway for foreign terrorists moving into Iraq, and the Government of Syria must do more to halt the operation of foreign fighter networks within its territory.

During the recent operations in Basra, Sadr City and Maysan, Iraqi troops uncovered convincing evidence that Iranian lethal aid has continued to flow into Iraq. In addition, during those operations, numerous Mahdi Army militia fighters and leaders from the Mahdi Army's associated, highly trained special groups fled to Iran, where they received sanctuary. The lethal activities of Iran's Islamic Republican Guard corps, the Qods Force, contradict Iran's publicly stated policy of supporting the Iraqi Government and must cease.

Secondly, I would like describe the continuing increase in the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces, which has contributed substantially to the

improvements in the overall security environment. More than 580,000 personnel now serve in the Iraqi Security Forces, which represents an increase of over 21,000 personnel since our last report to the Council in June.

There are now 161 Iraqi army combat battalions conducting operations, which represents an increase of 14 battalions since our last report. Over 70 per cent or 113 of those Iraqi army combat battalions are assessed to be in the lead for operations. Of those, 93 are rated as able not only to take the lead in operations, but also to fully plan, execute and sustain operations with minimal or no assistance from coalition forces beyond enablers and adviser teams. Another 10 battalions are currently in force generation, and MNF-I plans an additional 10 for force generation in 2008.

The Iraqi air force and navy have made substantial progress as well. The Iraqi navy is now conducting an average of 42 independent patrols per week in Iraqi territorial waters, a 20 per cent increase in the past two months. In addition, the Iraqi navy also maintains security responsibility for the port of Umm Qasr. The Iraqi air force is providing support to counterinsurgency operations through intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance patrols of Iraqi borders and critical electric and oil infrastructure. Those efforts have resulted in the capture of insurgents and the identification of damaged infrastructure, allowing the Government of Iraq to expedite repairs and re-establish essential services. Furthermore, the Iraqi air force has proven itself very capable during combat operations in Basra, Sadr City, Mosul, Amarah and Diyala by successfully conducting transport missions, reconnaissance and casualty evacuation.

The national police also continue to increase their effectiveness and they are continuing their efforts to achieve a better ethno-sectarian balance within the force, through both recruiting and assignments, so that force demographics better reflect the Iraqi population. As of the end of July, 36 Iraqi national police battalions were conducting operations alongside a battalion-sized Iraqi emergency response unit. The national police forces have conducted more than 15 operational deployments outside of Baghdad, most recently in Basra, Mosul and Baqubah. That increased effectiveness and deployability marks the beginning of a transition from a static force centred on Baghdad to a rapid response force for the Government of Iraq.

Thirdly, I would like to provide an update on the role of the coalition. The support of the 30 countries contributing to the coalition, NATO's training mission and the operations of UNAMI is critical to the success of Iraqi efforts to build a stable and secure country. Coalition members other than the United States contribute over 9,000 forces to the Multinational Force and another 450 personnel to UNAMI. Every contributor, large and small, plays a critical role — from the Azeris, who have provided security at the Haditha Dam since 2003, to the Romanians, who provide route security in the Dhi Qar and Muthanna provinces. We also welcome the assistance of countries that continue to provide security for the United Nations personnel and have contributed to the United Nations trust fund. We remain committed to ensuring that the United Nations receives the guarantees necessary for it to sustain and expand its robust presence in Iraq.

Fourthly, I would like to emphasize that MNF-I is continuing progressively to transfer responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq. Ten out of 18 provinces are now under provincial Iraqi control, with Qadisiyah province having transitioned on 16 July. Other provinces are expected to transition by the end of this year.

In June, the Iraqi Government continued its offensive against illegal armed groups and the special groups, through Operation Promise of Peace in Missan, which focused on securing the provincial capital, Amarah, as well as the border and some smaller cities. Several senior provincial officials were arrested, and Iraqi security forces seized numerous caches of weapons of Iranian origin. Such operations show the willingness of Prime Minister al-Maliki and the Iraqi Government to confront militants, regardless of their sect or ethnicity, and to secure the country against the threat of malign Iranian influence.

Iraqi security forces, working alongside local groups, have also conducted operations in Mosul against Al-Qaida elements. Operations Mother of Two Springs and Lion's Roar denied Al-Qaida sanctuary in the urban areas of Ninawa province and captured and killed several leaders of Al-Qaida in Iraq.

Recently, Iraqi security forces and coalition units have launched a major clearing operation in Diyala province, north-east of Baghdad, to clear the remaining safe havens of Al-Qaida in Iraq and stop the Jaish al-Mahdi from smuggling and supplying lethal aid.

Iraqi security forces have significantly extended their control, not only through the execution of military operations, but also through the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and the restoration of basic services. Following the military operations in Missan province, the Government of Iraq is beginning to implement a $102-million programme to refurbish and rebuild schools, develop municipalities, improve electricity and health services, build up the police forces and provide clean water and unemployment assistance. That initiative follows similar reconstruction efforts to reduce the appeal of militant groups in Basra, Sadr City, Mosul and Amarah.

The fifth point I would like to discuss is political reconciliation. The willingness of the Government of Iraq to confront militias, regardless of sect, has encouraged the Sunni coalition Tawafuq to reconcile its internal differences and return its ministers to the Government, thereby providing an additional avenue for Sunni participation in the political process.

In late July, six ministers representing the Sunni coalition were approved for the cabinet and four new Shia ministers have filled vacant Sadrist seats. UNAMI remains deeply engaged in assisting the Government of Iraq in various political and diplomatic activities, including addressing internal border issues, promoting regional dialogue and assisting internally displaced persons and refugees, as we just heard. Recently, UNAMI has been instrumental in advising the Council of Representatives committee members in the preparation of the provincial elections law and the Iraq High Elections Committee as they prepared for and started voter registration on 15 July. We are encouraged by UNAMI's plans to expand its footprint in Iraq and believe that the assistance of the United Nations will be critical to Iraq's long-term development and stability. The proposed United Nations compound in Baghdad will ensure that UNAMI is able to continue its important role in Iraq, and we look forward to Iraqi support to ensure those facilities are constructed.

Sixthly, I would like to stress the importance of Iraq's neighbours in supporting Iraq's efforts to provide security, achieve political progress and build its economy. The Government of Iraq's security successes have fostered international confidence. Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have all named ambassadors to Iraq, and other neighbours, including Turkey, have recently sent high-level delegations to Baghdad. We hope that others in the region will follow their example.

Finally, I want to highlight that negotiations continue between the United States and the Iraqi Government on our transition relationship, including with respect to security, which will recognize the increasing ability of the Iraqi Security Forces to assume greater responsibility for security and stability.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/495), which is before the Security Council today, highlights the sustainable progress that has been achieved by the Iraqi Government, with the assistance of the United Nations and the support of the MNF-I and the Iraqi Security Forces. The international community supports a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq, and I call upon all parties to renew their commitment to assist the Government of Iraq in continuing the hard work to overcome the many challenges that remain.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Bayati (Iraq): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to present our thanks to your predecessor, His Excellency the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, for his distinguished efforts during his presidency in the month of July.

I would like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Alejandro Wolff for the briefing he presented to the Council on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) and for the efforts to support security and stability in Iraq during the previous months. Our thanks also go to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his statement, and our appreciation goes to Mr. Staffan de Mistura and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) team in Iraq and New York for their tireless work to help the Government and the people of Iraq.

My delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on the work of UNAMI contained in document S/2008/495 and would like to present the following comments. On the political and security level,the Iraqi Government has succeeded in preventing a sectarian war in the country and has proven that it is not a sectarian Government, but that it is one that represents all Iraqis without discrimination,

except on the basis of their ability to serve Iraq and defend its national interests.

During the past few months, Iraq has witnessed a series of military operations, led by the Iraqi army and carried out with the support of the multinational forces, in Basrah, Baghdad, Meesan, Mosul and Diyala. The operations have targeted members of Al-Qaida and other armed militia groups as well as other outlaws, and they have led to the success of the law enforcement plan, the enforcement of Government control and an 80 per cent decrease in the number of terrorist operations and violent acts.

The Iraqi Government has also succeeded in building its armed forces on a national, professional and neutral basis, which has led to their determination and will to confront Al-Qaida and other militias and to strike against those groups. It is now clear that the loyalty of the Iraqi troops is only to Iraq, not to particular rulers, parties or sects. The Iraqi Government is keen to stress human rights principles regarding the conduct of the Iraqi armed forces and to prevent those forces from having political affiliations.

The number of army, police and other security forces has increased in all provinces in accordance with their security needs. The Iraqi Government has assumed responsibility for security from the multinational forces in 10 Iraqi provinces — most recently, al-Diwaniya province, in July 2008. That is another step towards the assumption of full security responsibility for the remaining Iraqi provinces from the multinational forces and towards the achievement of complete control over security by the end of 2008.

The decline in violence in Iraq has led to a return to normal life in all parts of the country and has encouraged a number of internally displaced families and Iraqi refugees to return to their homes. The Iraqi Government, along with the Iraqi Council of Representatives and in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, is conducting a national strategy to encourage the voluntary return of those families. The Cabinet has allocated more than $195 million for the repatriation of internally and externally displaced persons, and the Government has allocated $140 million to help Iraqi refugees. That strategy also includes the evacuation of homes abandoned by their owners because of violence, the granting of financial incentives and the immediate and unconditional return of those who left their jobs. It is to be noted that 271 Iraqi families returned from Iran and 31 individuals returned from Refha camp, in Saudi Arabia, in May 2008. In addition, many Iraqi refugees have returned from Syria and Jordan in coordination with international organizations. Iraq has also provided support for countries hosting Iraqis.

The Iraqi Council of Representatives has adopted a provincial elections law to ensure the holding of free and fair elections in all Iraqi provinces, counties and villages. That legislation has been adopted to ensure the inclusion of all segments of Iraqi society and to ensure the holding of democratic elections without any external interference. We have just received information from Baghdad that a committee comprising Iraqi parliamentarians has been formed to discuss proposals regarding the provincial elections in Kirkuk and to bridge gaps in that regard.

The Iraqi Government is keen to proceed with the process of national reconciliation to maintain the unity of the Iraqi people, make progress in the national dialogue policy and expand participation in the political process in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution, in order to build a free, multilateral, federal and democratic Iraq. Although the political process faces some challenges, it is witnessing progress towards a democratic transition, positive political developments and coexistence among all segments of society. Within the context of the continuing national reconciliation efforts, the Iraqi Government is seeking to convene an expanded religious conference bringing together religious clerics from various religions, sects and nationalities, as a step to build solidarity among all Iraqis and facilitate the return of displaced persons to their homes. Moreover, the Iraqi Government is currently implementing a campaign to renovate houses of worship, including mosques and churches.

The adoption of a general amnesty law has had a positive role in enhancing the national reconciliation efforts. Under that law, the Ministry of Justice has released 1,648 detainees; the Ministry of Interior has released 2,560, including 59 Arab nationalists; the Ministry of Defence has released 545; and the Ministry of Labour has released 314. These are in addition to the detainees released by the Multinational Forces.

Political efforts have resulted in the return of the ministers belonging to the Tawafuq bloc to the

Government of National Unity, and the Council of Representatives has voted to appoint 10 ministers to fill ministerial posts vacated when the members of a number of political blocs withdrew from the Government in 2007.

At the socio-economic level, the improvement in the security situation has had positive effects on the economic situation in Iraq. The reports of the National Committee on Investment have indicated that the volume of investment in Iraq has reached $7.4 billion, which has been distributed among various basic facilities in the country. This has involved, inter alia, the building of factories, housing units, hospitals, pharmaceutical plants and refineries and the development of airports and ports with the involvement of Iraqi and foreign investors. Najaf International Airport was inaugurated on 20 July 2008. A large number of businessmen, investors and investment companies have already visited Iraq, and a number of investment agreements have been signed with many countries.

The Iraqi Government's top priorities have been to improve economic conditions and revive trade in order to move the country away from the brink of economic and social collapse. The Iraqi Government was able to reduce the inflation rate from 65 per cent in 2006 to 22 per cent in 2007, and it is expected that the unemployment rate will have been reduced to 17 per cent by the end of 2008, as compared with 28 per cent in 2003.

In April 2008, the Iraqi Council of Representatives adopted a law on civil servants and public sector salaries, as well as a university service law, in a step aimed at supporting higher education and scientific research institutes. That was part of an effort to support the public service sector, to prevent a brain drain and to take measures to encourage the return of qualified professionals to Iraq.

A social protection network has been established to provide care for members of certain social segments, such as orphans, widows and the unemployed, and $812 million has been allocated for that project. The share of the State's general budget for the education sector has been increased, from 3 per cent in 2007 to 5 per cent in 2008, and 700 new schools have been built, with another 4,000 to be built by the end of this year.

The process of health sector reform has been launched in order to provide primary health care and ensure the equitable provision of health services to all people. Approximately 300 health centres have been built, and approximately 37 general hospitals have been rehabilitated and expanded. In addition, a number of specialized hospitals and health centres are to be built in collaboration with a number of international companies. The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with UNAMI and the World Health Organization, has made significant achievements, such as decreases in the infant, maternal and under-5 mortality rates and progress in controlling cholera.

The Iraqi Government has launched a strategy to develop the agricultural sector, to achieve food security, to increase investment in agriculture and build capacity in that sector, to improve the quality of production, to protect the environment, to combat desertification and to provide modern machinery.

In relation to oil wealth, the Iraqi Government has made plans to increase production to 3.5 million barrels per day, with the continuous development of that sector through the adoption of legislation and an investment framework and the fair distribution of oil revenue. The Iraqi Government is keen to utilize its revenues for the benefit of the Iraqi people in the budget of 2008 through a financial policy leading to lowered inflation and the adoption of the largest budget in Iraq's history. It is worth mentioning that the Iraqi House of Representatives adopted a law on combating the smuggling of oil and petroleum products and considers oil smuggling to be an economic crime that threatens the security and economy of the country.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister stressed that Iraq is moving towards the implementation of reconstruction and investment projects that cannot be implemented until all forms of corruption are eliminated. Therefore, the Iraqi Government launched a national initiative to fight financial and administrative corruption, which is one of the most dangerous burdens that Iraq inherited from the former dictatorial regime.

Following the ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, a conference was held in Baghdad at which the Baghdad declaration on fighting corruption was adopted. The Iraqi Government committed itself and has pledged to fight corruption in all its forms and to promote the principles of

accountability and integrity. The conference also resulted in the establishment of a national council to fight corruption.

With regard to women's rights and the importance of their participation in the political process, the Iraqi Government has stressed that Iraqi women shall exercise their rights, contribute to the political process and effectively participate in the upcoming provincial council elections, in which the percentage of women candidates will be 25 per cent, the same as in the Iraqi Parliament. Moreover, Iraq has ratified a convention on the establishment of an Arab women's organization in the context of its aim to strengthen the role of women in Iraqi society. The Prime Minister has launched a project to form an institution to address the issues and problems of widows, divorcees and elderly women. The Government has allocated $200 million to that project.

The Iraqi Government has been keen to entrench the culture of human rights and has achieved progress in that area by establishing a national system to control and monitor violations of human rights. Monitoring teams were formed in the Ministry of Human Rights to cooperate with human rights departments in all other ministries. The Iraqi Government, in cooperation with UNAMI, drafted a law pertaining to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Iraq.

On the regional and international levels, the past few months have witnessed a regional and international openness towards Iraq since Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki travelled to Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and made a European visit to Italy and Germany. Iraq has also been visited by a number of high-level delegations from the Gulf States, as well as by the Turkish Prime Minister and the head of the al-Mustaqbal bloc in the Lebanese Parliament, Mr. Saad al-Hariri. Some Arab countries have sent messages expressing their desire to develop political and diplomatic relations with Iraq. Those visits have resulted in a positive change in attitude towards Iraq. The Governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan have announced the nomination of their ambassadors to Baghdad.

Furthermore, the visits of senior officials have resulted in the conclusion of several economic, security, trade and investment agreements with Iraq. We would like to mention here with appreciation the initiative of the Government of the United Arab Emirates to forgive Iraq's debts of $7 billion.

The meeting of the International Compact with Iraq held in Stockholm, Sweden, in late May 2008 achieved many positive results. The meeting welcomed the proposal to form a new partnership for development that includes the co-financing of new programmes with the international partners and has certain arrangements with the Paris Club with regard to Iraqi debt settlement. In that regard, my delegation would like to call on all brotherly Arab countries to promote their historical role with respect to their brothers in Iraq by forgiving Iraq's debts and to reconsider the percentage of the compensation payments imposed on Iraq because of the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a crime committed by the former dictatorial regime.

I would like to highlight the important role played by UNAMI in Iraq in providing support and advice to the Iraqi Government on the political, humanitarian, human rights, national reconciliation and constitutional processes, as stipulated in resolution 1770 (2007).

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my Government's request that the mandate of UNAMI be extended for another year, in recognition of its important role in implementing its mandate in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In demonstration of my Government's keenness to facilitate UNAMI's execution of its mandate, the Iraqi Government has decided to allocate a 40,000-square metre parcel of land in the international zone for its new integrated headquarters for 25 years. We hope that UNAMI will provide support and assistance in accordance with certain mechanisms and with the prior approval of the Iraqi Government. We also look forward to UNAMI having a more effective and influential role through the return of the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes to work inside Iraq and to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): As this is the first time I am speaking this month at an official meeting of the Council on behalf of the Viet Nam delegation, I would like to extend to you, Sir, and to the delegation of Belgium our most heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of the presidency

for this month. You can rest assured of my delegation's fullest support and cooperation in the discharge of your noble task.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his detailed briefing. I also thank Ambassador Wolff of the United States for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq. We welcome the participation of the delegation of Iraq in this debate and thank its Ambassador for his statement.

During the four months since the most recent report of the Secretary-General was issued, Iraq has continued to make commendable efforts to consolidate and expand its political and socio-economic achievements, as reflected in the lowest levels of overall violence since March 2004; the promulgation of key legislation on justice, amnesty, provincial powers and budget execution; the enhanced capabilities of Iraqi security forces to independently maintain national security and the rule of law; the intensive preparations for the provincial elections scheduled for October 2008; the recent participation of all political factions in the Cabinet; and the Government's announcement of a six-point proposal entitled "Partnership for Development". Equally noteworthy are macroeconomic records in increased domestic consumption, the revival of local businesses nationwide, a gross domestic product growth projected by the International Monetary Fund to be 8 per cent for the next two years, the decrease in inflation, the gradual settlement of external debt burdens, and significant revenues from oil exports.

Against that backdrop, Iraq still faces challenges that remind us of the magnitude of the tasks to be completed in order to facilitate the country's smooth transition to durable peace and sustainable development. They include sectarian violence and criminal acts, as manifested in the recent suicide bombings in Baghdad and some other areas; the delayed adoption of a package of laws on election and hydrocarbons; the unresolved status of Kirkuk; and the alarming rates of poverty and unemployment, as well as the humanitarian challenges caused by the internal and external displacement of Iraqi civilians. At the same time, much remains to be desired for enhancing national dialogue and reconciliation, advancing the legislative agenda and the constitutional review, curbing the illicit use of weapons and combating organized crime, promoting disarmament, demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants, creating an environment conducive to foreign and domestic investment and fostering socio-economic reform.

Given the aforementioned progress that the Iraqi people and Government have achieved, and given the challenges they are still facing, my delegation — while firmly supporting the Iraqi people in their endeavour to tap their vast natural and human resources and promote their cause of reconciliation, stabilization and reconstruction — recognizes the important role that United Nations agencies, neighbouring countries and the international community can play in this connection. We are encouraged by a series of international events, including the meetings of Iraq's neighbours in Istanbul and Kuwait, the meeting of Arab parliamentarians in Erbil and the Compact Annual Review Conference in Stockholm, which reflect the international community's engagement in helping Iraq's reconstruction, development and reintegration. Along with other encouraging developments such as the operationalization of regional working groups on energy, refugees and security and the normalization of bilateral relations between Iraq and neighbouring countries, we hope that this emerging partnership and cooperation will be sustained and will be translated into further concrete action to serve mutual interests of all relevant stakeholders, on the basis of respect for the political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

My delegation commends the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to assist the Government of Iraq in addressing key priority issues as mandated by Security Council resolution 1770 (2007), especially in terms of advancing national reconciliation, resolving issues of disputed internal territories, extending constitutional and electoral assistance, providing humanitarian relief and promoting regional dialogue. We support the continued presence and enhanced coordination of UNAMI and the United Nations country team in Iraq.

We thank the United States delegation for the draft resolution on this issue and are ready to work constructively with other Council members towards a consensus text for early adoption.

Mr. La Yifan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish at the outset, Sir, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Also, we appreciate the outstanding

contribution made by the delegation of Viet Nam last month.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing, and we welcome the briefings provided by Ambassador Wolff and the Permanent Representative of Iraq on the situation in that country.

It has been a year since the Security Council adopted resolution 1770 (2007), which expanded the mandate of United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We are pleased to note that, in extremely complex and difficult circumstances, UNAMI has strictly abided by its mandate pursuant to the Council's resolutions and has made good progress on all fronts. Those are facts that we fully acknowledge. Changes and developments in the situation concerning Iraq have created more space for a United Nations role, while posing more challenges to the Organization.

We support a 12-month extension of the current mandate of UNAMI. We hope and expect that Mr. De Mistura and his team will continue to fulfil their mandate with great enthusiasm and professionalism and in an innovative spirit. We wish to stress a number of points with respect to the future of UNAMI.

First, UNAMI should continue close consultations with the Iraqi Government. At the same time, it should increase its engagement with all segments of Iraqi society and carry out all its work in a pragmatic manner, so as to gain as much understanding and support as possible.

Secondly, UNAMI should carry out all its mandated tasks in a comprehensive and balanced way, in areas such as progress on the political front, electoral assistance, constitutional review, regional cooperation, economic reconstruction and the protection of human rights — areas on which UNAMI can do more.

Thirdly, UNAMI should also play a coordinating role in the sphere of humanitarian assistance and economic and social reconstruction, and it should create synergy with the various United Nations offices in Iraq.

And fourthly, the safety and security of United Nations personnel in Iraq is, as always, a key priority. The Iraqi Government and the countries concerned should continue to bear primary responsibility in this area. Any future new arrangement should take full account of concerns regarding the safety of United Nations personnel.

We welcome the remarkable progress that Iraq has achieved in the political, security and reconstruction areas. But we must not ignore the fact that the security situation in Iraq remains fragile and that the number of civilian casualties remains high. Once again, we urge that military activities in Iraq avoid causing civilian casualties to the greatest possible extent. Sustainable security is the basis for the resolution of other problems faced by Iraq. In order to cement the gains made on the security front, further efforts must be made to advance political dialogue and national reconciliation. We hope that all Iraqi parties will put national interests above all else, enhance dialogue and consultation and establish a solid political consensus on important issues such as the country's future. We encourage UNAMI to play an active role in that regard.

The provincial elections now being prepared will be a key step in the Iraqi political process. To ensure that those elections play a positive role in the political process, it is of no less importance to avoid delays than to ensure the impartiality and inclusiveness of the elections themselves.

The security situation, the political process and socio-economic reconstruction are complementary. Iraq abounds in natural and human resources and has vast potential for economic rehabilitation and development. The international community should honour its pledges of assistance to Iraq, fully tapping the potential of mechanisms such as the International Compact with Iraq and the meetings of Foreign Ministers of neighbouring countries so as to further promote the development and reconstruction of Iraq.

Although Iraq continues to face all manner of challenges and difficulties, we firmly believe that the situation will gradually improve. Like the peoples of every other sovereign State, the Iraqi people have the right and the ability to govern their own affairs and to live their lives in dignity, free from want and fear.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset, Sir, to congratulate you and your delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and to reaffirm my delegation's intention to support you in your work. I wish also to thank the delegation of

Viet Nam for its excellent work during the month of July.

I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. Also, I thank Ambassador Wolff of the United States for his statement on behalf of the Multinational Force, and I thank the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his statement.

Costa Rica welcomes the improvement of the still-delicate situation in Iraq. We acknowledge the endeavours of the Iraqi Government, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Multinational Force. In that regard, my country supports the renewal of the mandate of UNAMI and welcomes the fact that this will take place on terms satisfactory to the Government of Iraq.

In our view, the United Nations presence has been decisive in the progress that has been made. We recognize and value the relations that UNAMI maintains with the Government of Iraq and we advocate its continued strengthening. The extended mandate of UNAMI, the leadership of Special Representative De Mistura and the commitment of his staff have made it possible for UNAMI to become a facilitator of solutions, an agent for change and an ally in the peacebuilding and sustainable development of Iraq. The natural role of the United Nations in Iraq is to be a promoter of development, a facilitator of change and a catalyst for the improvement of the living conditions of the Iraqi people.

Iraq's problems can be solved only through reconciliation and understanding among Iraqis without exclusion. The immediate attention that must be paid to the security situation must go hand in hand with a process of extending the legitimacy of the Government and its institutions. It is for the international community to support all endeavours to promote inclusive and meaningful political dialogue, as indicated by the Secretary-General in his report (*S/2008/495*).

In the tasks of dialogue and reconciliation, of particular importance is the process of electoral preparation being carried out in Iraq with a view to the provincial elections. Here, we urge the adoption of the necessary legislation providing guarantees to all political configurations for the important process in October and conferring all the necessary legitimacy on the result of these electoral processes.

Sustainable peace is the result of a delicate combination of factors that can provide the certainty of achieving a better future through effort and discipline. In that regard, Costa Rica wishes to emphasize the need to pay special attention to two aspects.

First, there is a need for public investment, particularly public investment that is more dynamic, broader and effective for development. There is also a need to ensure that the security situation is not improved at the expense of fundamental freedoms, the protection of the civilian population and the human rights of all. With regard to public investment, we believe that Iraq should exploit and invest as quickly as possible the profits from its considerable oil income. That which, for countries like Costa Rica, represents an economic burden can and must be an opportunity to promote the development of the people of oil exporting countries, and in this particular case the people of Iraq.

The second aspect that we would underline as an indispensable ingredient for peace is the necessary balance to be struck between public security, fundamental freedoms and the enforcement and full enjoyment of human rights. Costa Rica joins in the Secretary-General's call on all security forces in Iraq, including the Iraqi Security Forces, to continue to do everything possible to avoid harming civilians and the disproportionate use of force.

Political dialogue, reconciliation, strengthening the legitimacy of the Government and its institutions, the necessary improvement in the security situation without undermining the rule of law, and increasing investment in the people and their welfare are the keys to a promising future for the Iraqi people. The United Nations has a fundamental role to play in accompanying these complex processes.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I join my colleagues in welcoming you, Mr. President, to your role as President of the Council for the month of August, and express our thanks to Ambassador Le Luong Minh and his team for the excellent way that they guided the Security Council last month.

I would also like to join colleagues in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his presentation on the Secretary-General's report. We also thank the United States representative for his presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq. It was very good to see the Iraqi ambassador here again today, and I express my thanks to him for the work that his Government is

doing and for its cooperation with the coalition forces, which are pleased to work with strong Iraqi leadership.

The United Nations continues to play a vital role in Iraq's development as a democratic and stable country, and on behalf of my Government I would also like to thank the United Nations and the whole of its Iraq team for the important work that they do.

As the Secretary-General acknowledges in his report, and as echoed by most of the speakers today, thanks to operations led by the Iraqi Security Forces with support from coalition troops, violent incidents across Iraq are at their lowest level since 2004, and more generally the security situation across the whole of Iraq continues to improve. The Iraqi Government has taken tough action against armed groups and militias, regardless of sectarian affiliation, and Iraqi security forces are delivering on their responsibilities. The improved security situation has provided a platform for further essential progress on reconciliation. We have seen not only increased cooperation between Sunni communities and the Iraqi Government in areas such as Anbar and Mosul, and the return of the Tawafuq Sunni bloc to the Government, but also the passage of key legislation that is helping to embed democracy. The next stage will be provincial elections, which will reinforce the political progress made at the national level. They will allow those who did not participate in the last provincial elections in January 2005 to enter the political process and they will contribute to the political reconciliation that the Secretary-General rightly highlights in his report as required for long-term stability.

As previous speakers have said, we recognize, of course, that progress is fragile and that we cannot take it for granted. Millions of Iraqis remain displaced, the infrastructure continues to suffer the impact of 30 years of mismanagement, and the level of unemployment remains too high. The attacks in Baghdad and Kirkuk last week remind us that there are groups that are still determined to inflict violence and create instability.

I would like to use this occasion, if I may, to say a few words about the British role in Iraq, particularly in the light of some recent misinformed press speculation. It was very good, also, to hear from the Iraqi Ambassador just now how successful Iraqi-led military operations have been in parts of Iraq.

The British Prime Minister explained the latest United Kingdom plans in a statement made on 22 July 2008, but I would like briefly, if I may, to summarize those plans here. Ten months ago, we set out the key elements of our strategy for handing over security in Basra to the Iraqis and we set up stages for completing the tasks we had set for ourselves.

The initial phase was completed when Basra was transferred to provincial Iraqi control in December of last year. That transfer reflected a judgement on our part that the Iraqi authorities and security forces were ready to take the lead in delivering security in Basra, a judgement that has been borne out by the Iraqi Security Forces' subsequent decisive action to establish the rule of law in Basra and to conduct successful operations, to which we were pleased provide support.

The Iraqis are now very much in the lead in Basra, and the over 4,000 British troops remaining in southern Iraq are focused on completing 13 key tasks in support of that Iraqi lead. Those key tasks include completing the training and mentoring of the fourteenth division of the Iraqi army in Basra, including through the embedding of around 800 personnel in the fourteenth division command structure; finalizing the preparation of Basra airport for civilian control; and continuing to develop the capacity of the Iraqi navy and marines to protect territorial waters, the port and oil platforms.

As we complete those tasks, and as progress continues in those different areas, we will continue to reduce the number of British troops in Iraq. Of course, future decisions will, as they have always been, be based on the advice of our military commanders on the ground and will be taken in consultation with the Government of Iraq and our coalition partners. We expect a fundamental change of mission in the first months of 2009 as we make the transition to a normal bilateral relationship with Iraq similar to those that we have with other key partners in the region.

Sustainable progress in Iraq will be achieved only with continued support from the international community. As we have heard today, important challenges lie ahead. Some of these include the need for progress on key nation-building issues, such as the review of the constitution and disputed internal boundaries; the provincial elections scheduled for later this year; the humanitarian situation, both inside and outside Iraq; developing the infrastructure essential for promoting and protecting human rights; and the need to support the maturing Iraqi democratic structures and

institutions. We welcome the involvement of the United Nations in these issues and we will continue to work with the Organization to ensure that these challenges are overcome in a timely fashion.

Let me conclude by saying that the United Kingdom remains committed to Iraq through our United Nations and coalition obligations. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all Member States to support both the United Nations work in Iraq and the work of the Government of Iraq. But above all, I would like to make it clear that we will stand by the commitment we have made to the people of Iraq to ensure that Iraq continues to develop as a democratic, prosperous and stable country, free from terrorist violence and secure within its borders, and a stable presence in the region.

Mr. Skračić (Croatia): As this is the first time my delegation is taking the floor this month, we would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency for the month of August and assure you of our full support. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Le Luong Minh of Viet Nam and his delegation for their excellent work last month. My delegation would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his informative briefing, as well as Ambassador Wolff for his update on the ongoing efforts on the part of the Multinational Force in Iraq and the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his remarks.

The present report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2008/495) once again has shown that Iraq is making strong, albeit measured, progress, especially in the security and political fields. Croatia welcomes the assessment, made by the Secretary-General in paragraph 56 of his report, that "Thanks to concerted political and military efforts ... there has been continued improvement in the security situation across Iraq". We believe that these efforts, aimed at creating an adequate and reliable, as well as a safe and secure, security environment for all Iraqis, are commendable.

Although we note that casualties among both Iraq's security forces and the civilian population continue to occur at unacceptably high levels, we have noted with satisfaction the increased cooperation and partnership demonstrated by local officials with the Government, which has been coupled with renewed efforts by the Iraqi Security Forces to break the cycle of violence. This strengthened cooperation with local elements has proven to be crucial to the success of a number of security operations conducted during the reporting period against rebel or terrorist groups, with increasing levels of success.

That said, we do recognize, as is mentioned not only in the report of the Secretary-General, but also in the draft resolution of UNAMI's extension, that many security challenges remain in Iraq. More needs to be done to ensure civic and political freedoms, and the wider human rights situation throughout Iraq remains alarming. While we understand the many challenges associated with simultaneously attempting to strengthen and uphold the institutions of democracy while faced with armed rebel groups and criminal gangs responsible for abductions, assassinations and numerous other crimes, we hope that in addressing these issues the Iraqi police and security forces will manage to strike the necessary balance between public safety and upholding international humanitarian and human rights law on the one hand, and the need to stamp out the operations of these criminal gangs on the other.

While it goes without saying that security must be a prerequisite for any successful political process, we also need to keep in mind that democracy is an ongoing practice that requires both time and resources to succeed. We welcome UNAMI's continued work with Iraq's Independent Electoral Commission and welcome what was just mentioned by the Permanent Representative of Iraq: that with UNAMI's professional guidance and assistance, the Government has been able to overcome the remaining problems associated with the passing of the new provincial election law, including on the inclusion of women candidates. The adoption of the election law will not only provide a platform in which local elections can take place this year, but will also give ordinary Iraqis a chance to make a difference in those areas with which they are best acquainted: their local communities.

The constitutional review impasse continues to be of concern for my delegation, especially as the stumbling blocks to the success of this operation are being revisited time and again. We hope that the Constitutional Review Committee, which itself recognizes that the stumbling blocks are mainly political in nature, manages to use the time requested until the end of this year in order to address these issues and finalize its report.

Moreover, we continue to be concerned with the persistent and ongoing problems associated with the passage of laws on hydrocarbons, especially when taking into account Iraq's increasing oil revenues, which need to be managed effectively and responsibly for the benefit of all Iraqis. We hope that the committee of central and regional Government officials, established to resolve these outstanding issues, will complete its work in a timely manner.

Croatia also welcomes the confidence-building efforts being conducted by UNAMI with regard to helping to address the issue of disputed internal boundaries, with the analyses conducted and presented on several areas in northern Iraq. It also hopes that the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan regional government will continue to use the good offices and advisory role provided by UNAMI to find a solution to the internal boundaries question as soon as possible.

We recognize that, as was mentioned in previous reports, wider regional cooperation and dialogue are crucial for the long-term stabilization and prosperity of Iraq and its surroundings. The active and willing engagement of neighbouring countries in strengthening Iraq's international standing is essential in this process. We are pleased to see that a number of neighbouring countries — Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates — have announced that they will be resuming full diplomatic representation in Baghdad. We welcome especially the visit by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan to Iraq in July this year. This, along with Iraq's accession to the Gulf Cooperation Council, the successful holding of the third expanded Ministerial Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, held in Kuwait in April this year, as well as the high-level International Compact with Iraq Annual Review Conference, held in Sweden in May, are all vital for Iraq's continued reconstruction and development.

Allow me to finish by reiterating Croatia's belief that UNAMI, under the able leadership of Special Representative De Mistura and his staff, continues to be well placed to undertake a central and leading role in the international efforts aimed at helping Iraq overcome the plethora of challenges it is still faced with, including but not limited to its role in assisting the central and local governments in advancing political as well as economic dialogue, assisting in the constitutional reform process and facilitating dialogue on the regional level.

The progress achieved thus far gives us hope that the Iraqi people are determined to overcome these challenges so as to transform Iraq into a fully integrated and consolidated member of the international community. We support them in that goal.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I should like to congratulate Ambassador Le Luong Minh and the delegation of Viet Nam on their successful guidance of the Security Council in July, and to wish you, Sir, equal success for the delegation of Belgium in doing your difficult job as President of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe, who introduced the report describing the situation in Iraq and the work of the United Nations structures (S/2008/495). We listened with interest to the comments of the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Mr. Al-Bayati, who has given us an assessment by his country's authorities regarding recent events there. We are also grateful to Ambassador Wolff for his briefing on the activities of the Mulitnational Force in Iraq.

On the whole, the report submitted to us objectively reflects today's realities in Iraq. We agree with most of the report's findings and conclusions. We are pleased to note that the report describes a certain amount of progress on security, which has taken place in some Iraqi governorates. However, it is still too soon to talk about the irreversibility of that process.

In recent days and weeks, certain high-impact terrorist acts have taken place in Baghdad and Kirkuk, and several less sensational but no less ruthless clashes and attacks have been committed by extremists in various areas of the country. We support the approach of Iraqi leaders and all political forces to achieve a lasting settlement by advancing a real, comprehensive inter-Iraqi dialogue and by strengthening national reconciliation and understanding. In that connection, we think that expediting the adoption of laws regarding local elections and hydrocarbon is critically important to the sustainable political and economic development of the country and to the stabilization of the situation there as a whole.

We note the active efforts made by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to help Iraq resolve those challenges. We believe that, in that context, the question of maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq remains a top priority. An important event in that regard will be the elections to

the local organs of power, preparations for which are under way with the active assistance of UNAMI. We believe that the elections should take place in transparent conditions and that the results must be accepted by all Iraqis.

An equally important goal is the facilitation of a settlement in Iraq by the States of the region and by the international community as a whole. In that regard, steps are being taken, in terms both of political issues, as mentioned in the report — for example, the opening of new embassies in Baghdad — and of economic issues, which include in particular processes to write off Iraq's foreign debt. We are pleased to note that, following the lead of the Russian Federation, a number of other countries are stepping up to resolve that problem.

We welcome the prospect of establishing a general time frame for the presence of foreign troops in Iraq. We think it is important that the appropriate agreements not infringe on Iraq's sovereignty or cause new conflicts or fissures in Iraqi society. We believe that a democratic, unified Iraq, strengthened in its sovereignty, will become an important factor for the stability of the Persian Gulf region and for the entire Middle East.

We agree with the concerns expressed in the report of the Secretary-General about the serious violations of human rights in Iraq. We support the goal of UNAMI to continue to work with the Government of Iraq and Iraqi officials to put an end to impunity and to redress the human rights situation as a whole. We support UNAMI's practice of preparing periodic reports describing the humanitarian and human rights situation in Iraq. Those reports must include statistics about the number of civilian casualties, which unfortunately remain high.

We strongly condemn attacks on civilians and civilian deaths resulting from indiscriminate and excessive uses of force. There is no justification for armed groups that use suicide bombers and engage in the process of hostage-taking to attain their goals.

We are very concerned about the activities of private security companies and other mercenary structures in Iraq, which often violate the rights of innocent civilians and the norms of international humanitarian law.

We welcome the recent accession by Iraq to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. We call upon all parties to implement resolution 1612 (2005), including the full deployment in Iraq of a monitoring and reporting mechanism. We hope that those steps will help mitigate the inhumane treatment of children in Iraq, including the detention of underage children in military jails in contravention of international standards, and the still widespread practice of using child soldiers.

In conclusion, allow me to once again express our profound gratitude to the United Nations personnel, who, in extremely difficult conditions in today's Iraq, are valiantly and effectively doing their jobs, as defined in the Security Council's mandate.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): Allow me to first congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of our work in August and to express our heartfelt thanks to the Vietnamese delegation for its excellent work and stewardship of the Council in the intense month of July.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe; the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States, Ambassador Wolff; and the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al Bayati, for their thorough and informative remarks.

Italy welcomes the improvements in the security situation in Iraq and greatly appreciates the progress made by the Iraqi authorities and the Iraqi Security Forces to counter terrorism and unlawful armed groups in a framework of growing self-reliance and ownership by those authorities and with increasing cooperation from local communities. Further improvements in the security framework are indispensable to promoting economic and social growth.

It is therefore our hope that the objective of completing the transfer of responsibility for security to Iraq — which has already taken place in 10 out of 18 governorates — will soon be achieved in all governorates. Increasing the reliability of the Iraqi Security Forces is one of the objectives to which Italy attaches the utmost importance and to which it contributes concretely through its participation in the NATO training mission.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his report (*S/2008/495*), the security and political gains of the

past months have to be sustained through meaningful political dialogue and national reconciliation. All expressions of democracy in the country should be included in the political process so as to enable the consolidated political dialogue to make a strong contribution to improving security conditions. We also appreciate any measure aimed at countering sectarianism or attempts to discriminate against ethnic and religious minorities.

To consolidate the progress made thus far, we also appreciate the efforts to offset the potentially negative effects of the question of Kirkuk and other contested areas. We fully support the United Nations initiative for an agreed political solution articulated through a gradual approach, starting with the administrative reform of the less problematic areas. We also encourage all Iraqi political forces to do their utmost to reach an agreement on an electoral law so as to be able to hold provincial elections within the year.

We are also most appreciative of the recent allocations decided on by the Iraqi Government to alleviate the conditions of refugees in Syria and Jordan and of internally displaced persons, as well as initiatives to foster their re-entry and reinsertion into the country. That is an issue that deserves all our attention.

Finally, allow me to state once again Italy's belief in the central role that the United Nations — through the brave and committed efforts of Special Representative De Mistura and all national and international staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) — can play in helping Iraqis, in accordance with the broad mandate provided by resolution 1770 (2004). We are therefore honoured and proud to be one of the sponsors of the draft resolution that, on the basis of a request by the Iraqi Government, will renew UNAMI's mandate for one more year.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your delegation on your assumption of your responsibilities as President of the Security Council for the month of August. I wish also to express our profound appreciation to Ambassador Le Luong Minh and the delegation of Viet Nam for their able stewardship of the Council's work in the past month.

I would like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his comprehensive briefing, Ambassador Wolff of the United States for his statement on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq, and the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his important remarks.

The continued improvements in security across Iraq during the past three months have given the country and its people a chance to achieve peace, stability and prosperity. My delegation recognizes the contribution of combined political and military efforts to that progress.

Despite the positive developments, security in Iraq remains fragile. The recent suicide bombings in Baghdad and Kirkuk that claimed a considerable number of civilian casualties are a reminder that investment in security is still of paramount importance. We recognize the significance of the military efforts by the Iraqi Security Forces in building peace and stability in Iraq. We welcome the fact that the Iraqi Security Forces are gaining confidence and capability, with an increasing number of units capable of leading operations.

My delegation continues to underline the importance of the protection of civilians. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/495), civilian casualties in Iraq have often been caused by the failure of all parties to the conflict to make the distinction between combatants and civilians, as well as by disproportionate attacks on civilian areas. My delegation therefore reaffirms that all parties should respect international human rights and humanitarian law and continue to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of affected civilians. We also share the concern of the Secretary-General over the psychosocial impact of violence and deprivation on millions of Iraqi children. We recognize the need for greater efforts and resources to address that challenge.

Military initiative alone cannot offer a solution. Achieving sustainable peace in Iraq will also require meaningful and inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation across the various divides. Significant support from all segments of the Iraqi population is critical to the achievement of long-term stability in the country. My delegation therefore believes that it is important for the people of Iraq to resort to peaceful means in settling disputes and to engage in political dialogue and reconciliation. The reconciliation meeting in Helsinki on 29 April 2008, which involved

30 representatives from Iraq's main political and ethnic groups, was a welcome step.

My delegation also recognizes the importance of the political progress that Iraq has achieved to the stability of the country. We welcome some recent positive steps aimed at strengthening unity within the Iraqi Government. The upcoming provincial elections will be an important stage in the democratic process in Iraq. We welcome the role of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq in that regard. We also recognize the challenges that Iraq continues to face in the early passage of its electoral law and in the constitutional review process. We welcome the commitment of the Government of Iraq to making progress in those efforts.

The current growing relations between Iraq and its neighbouring countries are a laudable development. We welcome the convening in Kuwait of the third expanded Ministerial Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq on 22 April 2008, as well as the first annual review conference of the International Compact with Iraq in Stockholm on 29 May 2008. We continue to attach primary importance to the International Compact with Iraq, which serves as a new partnership between Iraq and the international community in achieving the consolidation of peace and comprehensive development.

The continued presence of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and its contribution in Iraq remains pertinent and essential, considering the ongoing efforts of the Government and the people of Iraq towards economic development, embracing democracy, good governance and the rule of law, and promoting peace and stability.

UNAMI's role in supporting the secretariat of the International Compact with Iraq in Baghdad and in the review of its management to increase its effectiveness is commendable. Its assistance to the electoral processes at the governorate level, its support for reconciliation efforts and its contribution to establishing a process to address disputed boundaries are also laudable. We recognize the request of the Government of Iraq for UNAMI to continue its presence and its work in Iraq. Mindful also of UNAMI's important contribution to building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Iraq, my delegation very much welcomes such a request.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reaffirm our support for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Iraq.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation joins in the congratulations extended to you, Sir, and to your country as you assume the presidency. We also join in the congratulations extended to Ambassador Le Luong Minh of Viet Nam, his delegation and his country for the excellent way in which he presided over the Council in July. I should also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing, as well as the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States and the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

My delegation is pleased to note the positive evolution of the situation in Iraq, particularly in terms of security, with the exception of the recent attacks in Baghdad and Kirkuk. The ceasefire in Sadr City remains in force, with tangible benefits for the people, and the reintegration of the various political blocs into the Government represents significant and noteworthy progress. However, the Council must take into account the remarks of the Secretary-General to the effect that the situation is still critical and that the challenge requires redoubled efforts on the part of the Government of Iraq, as well as the combined efforts of all sectors of the population and the continued cooperation of the international community.

We acknowledge the important work being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to assist the Government of Iraq in developing an inclusive electoral system that will allow the holding of fair and transparent elections guaranteeing the participation of all. A peaceful Iraq also requires certain important common goals to be achieved, such as the law on hydrocarbons and the demarcation of internal boundaries. We should like to thank the Ambassador of Iraq for the information he has provided to us today on the progress made in those matters.

The delegation of Panama notes with optimism the recent initiatives of regional and international dialogue, in particular the commitments achieved at the meeting of the International Compact with Iraq in Stockholm and the decisions of Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates to reopen their diplomatic missions in Iraq. Those events reaffirm the

commitment of the international community to the cause of Iraq. We should also like to acknowledge the gesture by the United Arab Emirates in cancelling Iraq's debt.

Despite all those endeavours, the humanitarian situation in Iraq remains critical and deserves the greatest attention of the United Nations and Iraq. While we acknowledge the work that has been done, we also urge UNAMI and the Government of Iraq, in particular, to strengthen their response with regard to the basic needs of the most vulnerable population groups both within the borders of Iraq and beyond, so as to provide aid to the refugees in the region and to guarantee their safe and voluntary return. We also urge the international community to lend its efforts and cooperation to that difficult task.

Lastly, we note with concern the observations of the Secretary-General indicating that the human rights situation in Iraq remains alarming. The Council must pay more attention to the report prepared by the UNAMI Human Rights Office. To that end, the cycle of reports and discussion thereof must be improved. We are concerned about the serious situation of children, reports of gender violence and the excessive use of force against civilians, and the position of detainees. The consolidation and development of political and administrative institutions in Iraq must go hand in hand with security and the respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of its people. Here we echo the appeal to Iraq by the Secretary-General to take the necessary measures to enhance its system of protection and information with regard to human rights.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to express the thanks of the French delegation to the representative of Viet Nam and his delegation for the excellent work accomplished during Viet Nam's presidency last month. I should also like to thank Mr. Pascoe and Ambassador Wolff for their briefings.

France has noted with satisfaction the continued progress made in Iraq over the past several months in the area of security. In that regard, we welcome the increased transfer of responsibilities to the Iraqi forces and the efforts of the Iraqi Government. Disarmament of the militias is an important objective aimed at full restoration of State authority with regard to the security and maintenance of order. That initial progress, which has been made in particular as a result of the efforts of the Iraqi authorities, must now be supported by responses to the persistent challenges facing the people and the Government of Iraq. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has an important role to play in that respect.

The first challenge is the essential process of national reconciliation and constitutional review, which are objectives crucial to the consolidation of the Iraqi State. That process must be inclusive and must make it possible to isolate the forces that want Iraq to fail. It requires cooperation by all Iraqi political leaders, who must agree on an equitable sharing of power and resources on a consensual basis. It is now urgent that their stated intentions be translated into action. France hopes that UNAMI will continue its work of advising and supporting the Iraqi Government in carrying out political reforms and holding elections, which are essential for the consolidation of democratic institutions, the promotion of national dialogue and the reintegration of illegal armed groups.

The second challenge is related to the humanitarian and human rights situations. The humanitarian situation remains particularly worrisome. The French delegation welcomes the work done by UNAMI and all the United Nations entities concerned, particularly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the efforts of neighbouring States. It is now important that the Iraqi Government honour its commitments — particularly its financial commitment — with a view to the sustainable and safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights are also important commitments undertaken by the Iraqi Government at the Compact with Iraq Annual Review Conference, held in Stockholm on 29 May — commitments that we encourage. UNAMI's reports on the human rights situation in Iraq arouse great concern on the part of the French delegation, particularly with regard to observance of the rights of the many detainees held in Iraq. France fully supports UNAMI's work in that area and calls on all actors concerned to intensify their efforts. France and the European Union will continue to help to strengthen the rule of law in Iraq.

The third challenge concerns the economy. The French delegation welcomes the consolidation of Iraq's budgetary resources. That should make it possible for the Iraqi Government to continue to rebuild the country and to improve its people's access to basic services, in keeping with the aforementioned commitments undertaken at the first ministerial-level International Compact with Iraq Annual Review Conference. My delegation supports the work carried out by UNAMI in coordination with the Iraqi Government. However, the results will depend in particular on progress in the areas of financial transparency and economic governance.

Finally, the fourth challenge concerns the regional process. The support of countries in the region that have expressed a willingness to contribute to the stability and reconstruction of Iraq remains crucial. We welcome in particular the involvement of neighbouring States in the process begun at Sharm el-Sheikh in May 2007, on which there has been progress, as we were able to note at the expanded Ministerial Conference of Neighbours held in Kuwait on 22 April 2008. Here again, the role of UNAMI, in cooperation with the Iraqi Government, is important, as shown by the establishment of an ad hoc follow-up mechanism within the Iraqi Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

I should like to conclude my statement by welcoming the initial results obtained on the ground by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, thanks in particular to the personal commitment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura. My delegation reaffirms its full support for the efforts made by UNAMI under its mandate, which was strengthened by resolution 1770 (2007). We hope that the mandate will be renewed for one year, as provided for by the draft resolution circulated by the United States delegation.

In accordance with resolution 1770 (2007), those efforts should be carried out in a safe environment. Since in a few days' time we will be commemorating the fifth anniversary of the attack on the United Nations in Baghdad, which claimed the lives of 22 people, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, I should like to stress that — particularly given the possibility that the mandate of the Multinational Force might not be renewed at the end of the year — all the actors concerned should plan and take the measures necessary to maintain an appropriate level of security to ensure the smooth functioning of the Mission.

France, which currently holds the presidency of the European Union, is committed to the unity, sovereignty and integrity of a democratic Iraq. We wish to stress the Union's willingness to assist the Iraqis, in support of United Nations efforts, in restoring the peace and security to which they are entitled within a united and richly diverse State.

Ms. Qwabe (South Africa): We join others in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We also thank the delegation of Viet Nam for the good work done last month. In addition, we thank Mr. Pascoe, the representative of the United States and the Permanent Representative of Iraq for their briefings.

We note the relatively positive developments that have taken place over the past few weeks in Iraq. These include enhanced cooperation, both among political groups in Iraq and between Iraq and neighbouring countries. However, notwithstanding those positive developments, fundamental challenges remain. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/495) indicates, high levels of violence continue and civilian casualties remain unacceptably high.

The Secretary-General also reports that the human rights situation remains serious, particularly the violations of the human rights of civilians and detainees. Moreover, the dire humanitarian situation continues to have a negative impact on Iraqi and regional stability. A recent report from Refugees International indicates that more than 2 million Iraqi refugees live in neighbouring countries and that almost 3 million Iraqis are internally displaced. The continued delays regarding the finalization of the electoral and hydrocarbon laws, which are central to equitable representation and the equitable distribution of natural resources, are a further destabilizing factor.

We welcome the initiatives of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to establish a process for addressing disputed internal boundaries in Iraq. We also support all of UNAMI's efforts to assist the Iraqi people and Government in strengthening institutions for a representative Government, in promoting political dialogue and national reconciliation and in engaging with neighbouring countries. Indeed, the work of the United Nations in Iraq is testament to the international community's

determination to help the Iraqi people move beyond the current crisis.

South Africa therefore continues to support the presence of UNAMI in Iraq under its present mandate, in line with our commitment to multilateralism and conflict resolution. We believe that the United Nations has a particularly important role to play with regard to national reconciliation in Iraq. As the Secretary-General has previously indicated, the United Nations not only enjoys good relations with all parties across the political spectrum in Iraq, but also brings to the table its considerable experience and best practices gained from operating in other conflict situations. However, an expanded role for the United Nations, as foreseen in resolution 1770 (2007), can be realized only as circumstances permit. The safety of United Nations personnel must be an overriding consideration.

We conclude by reiterating the observation made by the Secretary-General in the present report that the gains made so far need to be sustained through meaningful political dialogue and national reconciliation. Time is of the essence, and Iraq can no longer afford continued delays in finding political solutions.

Mr. Tiendrébéogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We also express our gratitude to the delegation of Viet Nam for its outstanding conduct of our work last month.

Allow me also to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing and Ambassador Wolff for describing the situation with regard to the implementation of the mandate of the Multinational Force in Iraq. I further thank the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his important statement.

We are pleased to note that the overall situation in Iraq is improving, but it is clear that major challenges remain, in particular with regard to security. Fortunately, we note encouraging signs at the national level and welcome the ongoing compliance with the ceasefire in Sadr City, announced on 11 May, allowing for the gradual restoration of essential services and State authority in that neighbourhood. We also stress the good cooperation among local communities in preventing acts of violence and the ongoing capacity-building of the security forces.

The return to the Government of groups that were boycotting the political process reflects the considerable progress that has been made at the political level. Burkina Faso welcomes the dialogue begun among the Iraqi parties and facilitated by the meetings held in Helsinki on 29 April and in Baghdad on 5 July. We urge them to maintain and expand that process and to comply with the decisions taken at those meetings.

Furthermore, the risks of disagreement concerning the constitutional review process, the draft electoral law and hydrocarbons legislation must be mitigated. Equally important to national reconciliation is the delicate question of internal boundaries, which should be resolved as soon as possible through negotiation.

My delegation appreciates the regional efforts being made, in particular the high-level contacts between Baghdad and countries of the region, several of which have already announced the reopening of their diplomatic offices and the return of representatives of regional organizations. We urge the entire international community to promote regional dialogue and to maintain its support for the International Compact with Iraq, the implementation of which will help in rebuilding and developing the country.

We welcome the efforts of the Special Representative and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in particular in the quest for a solution to the issues of disputed internal boundaries and electoral assistance. We welcome the considerable fall in the number of attacks on the international zone and encourage all Iraqi parties to continue to cooperate with the Mission.

The Secretary-General's report describes a human rights and humanitarian situation that is still very worrisome. The Iraqi Government and all parties involved in Iraq must take the necessary and effective steps to guarantee respect for human rights, combat impunity and improve the overall humanitarian situation. The international community has a duty of solidarity with the Iraqi people. The country still faces a multitude of challenges, and that is why we support the renewal of the mandates of UNAMI and the Multinational Force, as sought by the Iraqi Government.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I assure you of our full engagement and cooperation with your work.

We also express our appreciation for the excellent work of Ambassador Le Luong Minh and the delegation of Viet Nam in presiding over the Security Council in July.

Allow me further to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. We highly appreciate the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and thank Ambassador Wolff, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America, for his briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

We welcome the improved security situation in some regions of Iraq, as clearly reflected in the statistics provided by Ambassador Wolff in his briefing. We also welcome the positive political developments in Iraq, including the end of the boycott of the Government by the Tawafuq bloc. Nevertheless, we wish to caution yet again that the stability of the security situation is contingent on national reconciliation and the conviction of all Iraqi parties that they have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in the governance of the country and to share the country's wealth equally, beyond all sectarian and ethnic considerations. The stability of the security situation is also contingent on the end of the occupation and on convincing Iraqis of their own full sovereignty over their territory.

Regrettably, there is much of concern in the Secretary-General's report (*S/2008/495*).

First is the rising level of violence. Operations undertaken by the MNF-I and Iraqi security forces continue to claim large numbers of civilian casualties. That is perhaps best reflected in paragraph 27 of the report.

Secondly, the human rights situation has been and remains grave. The report notes that

> "The human rights situation in Iraq remains serious ... UNAMI remained concerned about the physical safety and legal protection of hundreds of suspects arrested, as well as detention conditions and lack of due process following detention. Those apparently rounded up as suspects included a number of children." (*S/2008/495, para. 26*)

Furthermore, as a representative of the MNF-I noted recently, the Force is currently detaining 21,000 individuals under the pretext that the United Nations mandate gives the Force the right to detain any person it deems to be a threat to security.

Thirdly, ongoing abuses against children — including their recruitment and attacks on schools and hospitals — are widespread. The report states in paragraph 29 that "[a]pproximately 1,500 children are known to be held in detention facilities for alleged association with armed groups".

Fourthly, it is also a source of concern that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to face very difficult circumstances. The rate of return — 10,000 per month — is extremely low, which indicates that genuine efforts have not been made to create conditions conducive to return. We hope that the adoption of an Iraqi national policy on refugees and returnees will lessen the suffering of displaced persons and make resettlement easier for them. There have been reports that there are 2.5 million IDPs in Iraq and a similar number of refugees in neighbouring countries. We believe that this issue too merits special attention by the Security Council. We hope that future reports of the Secretary-General will contain greater detail on this matter.

Fifthly, yet another matter of concern is that the adoption of some fundamental laws — such as an electoral law making possible the organization of elections to governorate councils — continues to be delayed. We were delighted to hear the Permanent Representative of Iraq speak of developments in that regard. On other contentious constitutional issues, we are also concerned about the ongoing dispute on the status of Kirkuk.

Libya supports all ongoing efforts towards national reconciliation in Iraq. We support a stable security situation, an end to occupation and the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We greatly appreciate UNAMI's efforts to assist Iraq, along with those of all other United Nations entities. We attach importance to the observations contained in the report of the Secretary-General before us today. In particular, we support his observation that

> "Iraq can no longer afford continued delays in finding viable political solutions. Long-term stability will require significant political buy-in from all segments of the population, many of which are not yet fully engaged in the political process". (*S/2008/495, para. 56*)

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Belgium.

I too take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Ambassador Le Luong Minh, for the excellent work of his team during the month of July. I also thank members for their good wishes as my country assumes the presidency of the Council for the month of August.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his presentation and Ambassador Wolff for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force. My thanks to also to Ambassador Al Bayati for his participation in the Council's debate today.

A year after the adoption of resolution 1770 (2007), Belgium reaffirms its support for the expanded mandate it gave to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We thus welcome the wish of the Iraqi authorities to extend the mandate of UNAMI. That extension will come at a turning point. We have noted the positive developments in the areas of security, national reconciliation and regional dialogue, and more generally we note the increased assumption of responsibility by the Iraqi authorities. But that progress cannot eclipse the magnitude of the challenges that remain; to the contrary, this underscores the urgent need to consolidate that progress.

The first way to do this is by deepening the political dialogue. We welcome the growing political involvement of diverse elements of Iraqi society, but the slow progress in the constitutional review and on the issue of disputed internal boundaries indicate the ongoing difficulty the Iraqis are experiencing in finding a comprehensive agreement on power-sharing and wealth-sharing. Here, Belgium welcomes UNAMI's constant readiness to provide technical assistance and mediation. Such assistance should facilitate the Iraqis' search for responses — responses that they alone have the legitimacy to make.

In that regard, we echo the Secretary-General's appeal for the adoption, as soon as possible, of an electoral law making possible the organization of provincial elections. That would further enhance the inclusiveness and legitimacy of the Iraqi political debate.

I turn secondly to the rule of law. We welcome the assessments of the Secretary-General and of Ambassador Wolff regarding the increased capacity and autonomy of the Iraqi Security Forces. The fatal attacks of recent weeks in Baghdad and Kirkuk should make all stakeholders realize the importance of continuing their efforts to ensure respect for basic principles of the rule of law, in particular regarding the protection of civilians, as well as respect for their fundamental rights, including the rights of detainees.

Thirdly, regarding Iraq's interactions at the regional and international levels, the close cooperation between the United Nations and the Iraqi authorities, in the context of the expanded Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq and the International Compact with Iraq, has made it possible to enhance the role of those mechanisms. Last month's debate provided an opportunity to welcome the willingness shown by the Iraqi Government, along with its neighbours and the entire international community, to deepen the dialogue with the common goal of ensuring the long-term stabilization of Iraq. Although this was reiterated in Kuwait and in Stockholm, it is nonetheless important to recall that this mutually beneficial dialogue must take place in the context of respect by all for the sovereignty of Iraq.

Turning, fourthly, to humanitarian affairs, it is an important underpinning of stability that the progress be reflected in the daily lives of the Iraqi people, starting with those of the 4 million Iraqis who have been forced to flee their homes. Belgium encourages the Government of Iraq to increase its efforts to assist them, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

More generally speaking, we welcome the willingness of the Iraqi authorities to make better use of the country's potential, by progressively taking ownership of reconstruction projects, while relying on an increased presence by United Nations agencies and on their expertise. Here, we noted last month's announcement by the Iraqi Government of its intention not to seek the renewal of the mandate of the

Multinational Force, as well as the start of negotiations on a bilateral security agreement.

I conclude by recalling that the Security Council is duty-bound to ensure that the United Nations mandate is carried out in adequate security conditions. Here, it my honour to announce that it is the intention of my Government to make a contribution of €250,000 to the special trust fund to support United Nations security in Iraq.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.